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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge of males and females in regard to the researched paper. To answer this question, a primary survey was used to gather data as the primary method. A survey was distributed to secondary school students in northeast Indiana as well as undergraduate level writing classes at a northeast Indiana university. Also examined were previously published studies to formulate a foundation for findings. The results of this study indicate that while males and females share similar knowledge about the researched paper, their perceptions and attitudes for a majority of the researched paper are vastly different. This study has several implications; the largest implication is that the researched paper must continue to be taught. Also, more in-depth research must be done in this area. Teachers and the public on all levels will greatly benefit from more published academic research in this area. The survey instrument is attached. (Author/RS)

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ED 459 481

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November 29, 2001

The Great Divide: Gender Issues in Attitude, Perception, and Knowledge Within the Researched Paper

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CS 510 681

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The Great Divide: Gender Issues in Attitude, Perception, and Knowledge Within the Researched Paper

The topic of this paper is "the researched paper," and the purpose is to find what, if any, differences exist between males and females regarding the researched paper. Our research question is "What are the attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge of males and females regarding the researched paper?" This question is relevant for several reasons, and we feel that this paper will be of great use to other composition teachers at all levels. First, the ideas shared and discussed in this paper will help both high school and college English teachers when focusing on the researched paper by giving them an idea of how males and females perceive the researched paper task combined with their knowledge base. Second, this paper may benefit students at both the high school and collegiate level as they sometimes struggle to find meaning and relevance in some assignments and lessons. Finally, it is the hope of the writers that this paper will motivate other educators to accumulate and analyze in-class data and research as we have. Our demographics are fairly different. While all college students, two of us are undergraduate students and two of us are graduate students. Our ages range from twenty-four to fifty-four, and we all vary in occupation and formal education. There are two teachers in the mix (one already with a master's degree), one science and English double major, and one business person. We are all fairly interested in gender issues within the researched paper, yet there are very few published surveys and studies in this area. A gap in this area is evident. So, we instead looked at some general

studies done on the researched paper to give us some basis for our research question. Our primary audience is those involved with assigning projects to students, and our secondary audience is scholarly researchers that may find this data useful in explaining, reinforcing current theories, or expanding ideas of what the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of students truly are in regard to the researched paper. This paper will be organized with a brief review of literature already published on the topic, a discussion of the methods and procedure used for this paper, a revelation of the results and findings of our primary research, and a discussion of the results as well as a formulated conclusion. While males and females share some common attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge of the researched paper, they also have some interesting differences in this area.

Review of the Literature

In order to adequately prepare for primary research, it was essential for us to first investigate the outside research already accumulated and printed on the topic. We examined several outside sources, but few discussed and addressed exactly what we were doing in our paper. However, they are still vitally important to our paper. A study done by Sciba (2001) notes that when students must make their own judgment calls about their research and resources, students feel more comfortable with their overall project. If a student has a higher regard for the resources he or she will use, that student will devote more time to the research paper.

Richard Larson (1982) and James E. Foley (2001) both underscore the importance of the steps in the researched paper. They both value the process of writing, as well as the thinking skills that students acquire when students successfully use the process. The skills a student learns in preparing a researched paper are of paramount importance to the

development of our students as thinkers and writers. Foley even goes so far to discuss the necessity to change the "topic" idea to a "personality" concept based on the student's writing of an obituary, or anything personal for that matter. His goal is to make it more intriguing for both the student and the teacher.

Gillisann Haroian-Guerin (1998) discusses the role of gender in her study involving genre and gender. After two writing class sections were observed, a conclusion shows that either gender can enjoy different genres of writing such as personal essays or argumentative, technical essays. It is usually assumed that only the female gender enjoys personal writing while males prefer the latter. In one section, the number of males and females listing the argumentative essay as their favorite was even with those preferring personal essays. The researched paper was the least favorite of either gender.

Ruth Schick (1992) reported results of a study done in Chile, Sweden, and the United States. In all three countries, the girls outperformed the boys in writing. She also reports that attitude and social class determines student writing performance, with social class especially influencing the females' writing. Rubin (1993) also reinforces the role of gender in the writing process because gender influences the topic choices, genre forms, and the length of journal writing. To further underscore gender issues, Connors (1997) notes that men are not as comfortable in writing about personal experiences. Men are usually more interested in writing adventure narratives.

Fran Lehr (1995) discusses the quality and quantity of student revision. Most students, she finds, are dedicated to surface revision, but those same students rarely make any attempt at global corrections. She notes that teacher intervention in the revision process produces higher revision results for students. Carolyn Matalene (1992) discusses the

importance and rarity of personal experience as evidence in the researched paper. In the case of college students, most find it easy to write about themselves, but find it difficult to include that personal writing in academic paper. Instead, their writing becomes detached and disembodied because they do not see personal experience as solid evidence. She asserts that students need to recognize the place for personal experience in writing, and teachers need to facilitate this.

Methods and Procedures

After we decided upon the topic for our collaborative paper, we pondered a series of questions to include in a student-generated survey. The student survey was our primary research instrument. This survey was distributed to secondary high school students in Northeast Indiana as well as undergraduate level writing classes at a Northeast Indiana university. The high school students that participated in the survey were from small cities and came from mostly rural and working class families. The college community that participated in the survey was a commuter-based student body with ages varying from mid-twenties to mid-forties.

First, the survey contained demographic questions that target gender, school grade, favorite subject, most successful subject, and the highest educational level achieved by the students' parents or guardians. Then, following this information, the students answered questions regarding researched papers and writing. We wanted to learn male versus female habits when writing and preparing a researched paper, as well as finding whether males and females understood when personal experience was appropriate in researched papers. We also wanted to find if there were any gender differences in preference in deadline assignments, time spent on the researched paper, and the sources that students use. After giving the survey

to approximately 250 students, (forty of which were college students) we decided to compare males and females at the high school senior level to males and females at the undergraduate sophomore level. A complete survey may be found by looking in Appendix 1, but the following questions that we analyzed are noted below.

1. **If given the choice, I would rather:**
- **Re-write a paper if I felt it was poor**
- **Turn in a paper knowing I will earn a low grade**

2. **I like it better when teachers:**
- **Assign me research deadlines in advance (i.e. give me the due dates for note cards, bibliography cards, rough drafts, final draft)**
- **Allow me to create my own deadlines knowing the due date of the final draft**

3. **I would rather write :**
- **A short researched paper using only outside sources**
- **A personal narrative**
- **A literary analysis**

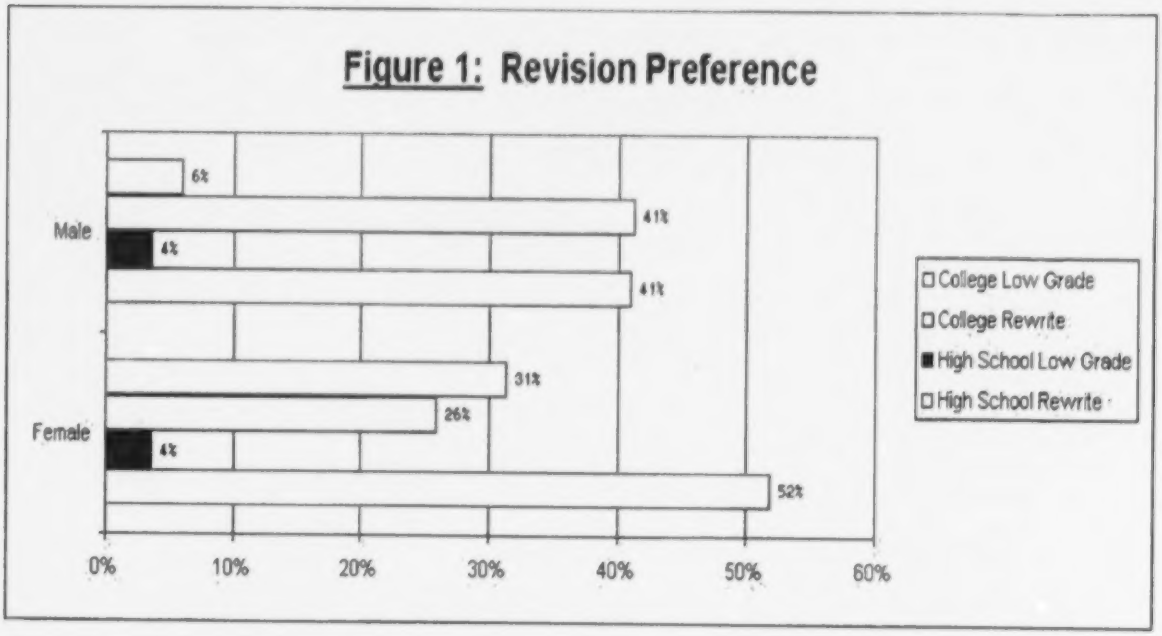
4. **Nightly, I spent the following time on my researched paper:**
- **30-60 minutes**
- **60-90 minutes**
- **90-120 minutes**
- **no time, I waited until the last minute**

We analyzed the data sets by breaking the results down into grade level and gender. Any attempt to divide data sets by parent or guardian education level proved to be both insignificant and inconclusive. We used percentages and ratios where appropriate as standard analysis methods. When discussing the primary research findings, we will refer to the data sets in one of these two forms.

Results and Findings

Our primary research produced solid results in all thirteen areas that we questioned; yet, as noted earlier, we focused on four main questions that proved extremely interesting in

gender discrepancy on the high school and collegiate level. Please look at Figures 1 through 4 below.



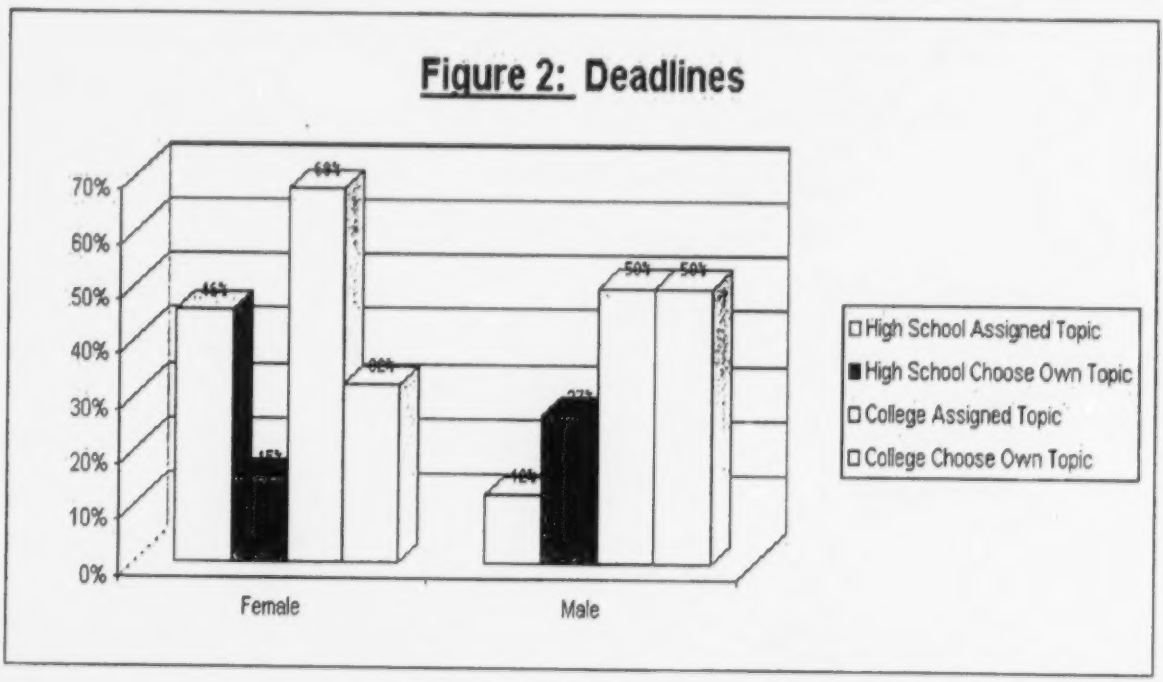


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Figure 3: Assignment Topic

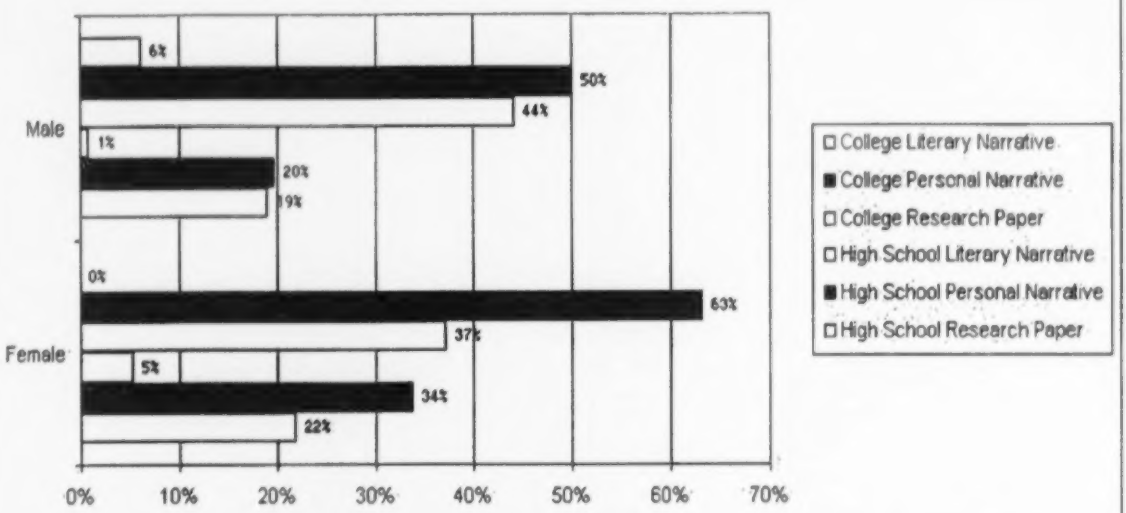
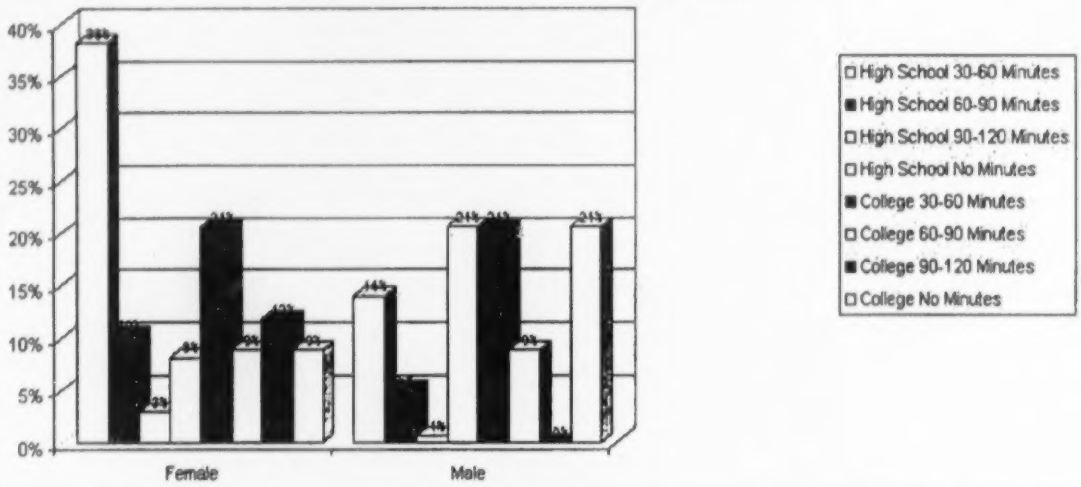


Figure 4: Nightly Studytime



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For the question "If given the choice, I would rather rewrite a paper if I felt it was poor, or turn in a paper knowing I will earn a low grade," all college students, male and female, would choose to rewrite the paper. On the high school level, ninety-three percent of girls would rewrite a poor paper while sixty-five percent of boys would rewrite a paper. These numbers correspond with the alternate option, where seven percent of girls would take a low grade, while thirty-five percent of boys would take a low grade on a poorly written paper.

For the question "I like it better when teachers either assign me deadlines, or I like to assign myself deadlines," seventy-five percent of high school females said they would rather have deadlines assigned to them, while only thirty-one percent of high school males prefer to have deadlines assigned to them. At the collegiate level, sixty-eight percent of females prefer to have deadlines assigned to them, while fifty percent of males prefer this option. Conversely, twenty-five percent of high school females like to assign themselves deadlines, while an overwhelming sixty-nine percent of high school males prefer this option. That is nearly a 3:1 ratio between males and females at the high school level. At the college level, only thirty-two percent of females like assigning their own deadlines, and an even fifty percent of males like their own deadlines. Note the discrepancy in the male choice of deadlines between the high school and college level. This will be discussed in the conclusion section.

For the question "I would rather write a research paper, a personal narrative, or a literary analysis," thirty-six percent of high school females prefer the researched paper, while fifty-five percent of those females preferred writing the personal narrative. High school males had almost no difference in preference, as forty-eight percent would write a researched

paper and fifty percent would write the personal narrative. The difference in preference was more dramatic in college. Thirty-seven percent of college females would write the researched paper while sixty-three percent would write the personal narrative; forty-four percent of college males would rather write a researched paper and again, fifty percent of those males would choose the personal narrative. The gender issues between high school and college are slightly different.

Finally, for the question "I spent the following time nightly on my researched paper: 30-60 minutes, 60-90 minutes, 90-120 minutes, none-last minute," sixty-four percent of high school females said they spent at least thirty minutes a night on their papers, while only thirty-five percent of high school males said they spent that much time. However, while only fourteen percent of high school females admitted spending no advance time on the researched paper, a whopping fifty-one percent of high school males admitted waiting until the last minute. The same statistics held true at the collegiate level; forty-one percent of college females spent at least thirty minutes on their papers, while an equal number of males did the same. However, while only eighteen percent of females admitted waiting until the last minute, forty-one percent of college males waited until the last minute.

Discussion of the Results/Conclusion

Our major findings indicate that while males and females do share some attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge regarding the researched paper, they also have some vast differences in those same attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge bases. It is interesting to note that a vast majority of males and females at both high school and college levels say they would rewrite their researched paper if given the opportunity. However, our primary findings refute the earlier findings of Fran Lehr. She notes that "revision seems to by synonymous

with editing or proofreading . . . students seldom make more global changes such as starting over, rewriting most of the paper, or adding or deleting ideas" (1). So, although an overwhelming majority of both females and males say they would rewrite, we question whether those who responded that they did truly understand what rewriting *entails*. This bit of information is valuable to educators because it defines, with the help of outside research, what students of both genders perceive editing and rewriting to be.

The attitude of males and females in regard to the researched paper is most evident in the other three questions we analyzed in our primary research. There is a startling gap between males and females in their feelings about deadlines. As noted from the figures above, a large majority of high school females (75%) want their deadlines assigned, while a fairly small number of high school males (31%) desire the same thing. The discrepancy between males and females still exists at the collegiate level, though not as severely. Sixty-eight percent of females and fifty percent of males appreciate assigned deadlines. This primary research statistic does not fit the Sciba article, as it notes that if students have control over their researched paper they are more likely to put effort into the paper. Actually, it directly contradicts this argument and finding. More females than males are likely to spend nightly study time on their researched paper, yet the females are the ones who prefer having the teacher control their deadlines.

Our primary research finding the male and female preference in writing genre does match already published research. We found that high school females prefer writing personal narratives by nearly twenty more percentage points, while high school males are evenly split in preference of the researched paper or the personal narrative. By referring to the graphs on pages six and seven, we note that college males and females share the same general attitude

toward the researched paper and personal narrative. Our primary findings match both Rubin and Connors, as they note that males are more comfortable writing technically or in adventure style. It seems that even as students get older, gender preferences do not change. Actually, they became stronger, as only fifty-five percent of high school females would write a personal narrative, but a strong sixty-three percent of college females would write the same personal narrative. This fact is enforced by Pat Rossi, a teacher at IPFW. "Girls score high when they write the personal narrative, but they have trouble when writing the researched paper because they can't keep themselves out of the personal example mode," he noted.

Maybe the most telling statistic within our primary research indicative of the gender gap in the researched paper is illustrated with the question of time spent on the researched paper. While a mere fourteen percent of high school females wait until the last minute, nearly four times that percentage of males (51%) admit spending no time. The same holds true for college genders as eighteen percent of females and forty-one percent of males admit spending no time on the paper. This is most telling because in our opinion, it makes a direct statement about how males and females feel about the researched paper as a whole. As a general rule, when a person likes or enjoys something he or she is doing, that person will do it more often. The attitude of males seems to be much more negative regarding the researched paper. It has been established through the course of our study that a majority of students have a strong knowledge base regarding the researched paper, yet the perceptions of males and females, as well as their attitudes, vary greatly. While both sexes perceive the paper as a chore, females are more willing to put in small amounts of time on a daily or semi-daily basis, while males desire to wait until the last minute. Also, males desire more control over their writing and research process, while females are comfortable having their tasks

delegated on a timeline scale. This is interesting because we see from our primary study that a majority of males ignore deadlines from the beginning, and females are more apt to follow deadlines when assigned.

Finally, although we chose not to touch on the survey question of enjoyment in research and writing, we do make one observation that is fairly interesting. Across the board, males and females disliked the writing component of the paper, but college students of both genders tended to enjoy doing the research. There were those few dissenters in the college classes of both genders who added comments like "I was in Hell," but one thing is striking across the board between males and females at all schooling levels. While most students do not enjoy all aspects of the researched paper, most will agree that they understand *why* the process is taught; they also believe they glean something from the researched paper process that they will use in the future.

Implications

So what are the implications of our research? It is interesting to note that while all four of us searched for gender specific issues regarding the researched paper, we were able to find only a handful out of nearly 4,000 articles in the Helmke Library on the IPFW campus. It is definitely evident that males and females share some attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge about the researched paper, yet it is also clear that the differences overshadow those similarities. Males and females seem to share a similar knowledge base, yet females have a stronger preference for the personal narrative; they both would rather write a personal narrative than the researched paper. The major difference between gender and the researched paper is located within how the sexes feel about and perceive the activity. Our study implies that more in-depth research needs to be published on this topic. Gender is a major writing

issue in both high school and collegiate English classes today, yet very few concrete studies and discussions have been published on this issue. Future research on this topic would be fairly easy to do, yet very time-consuming. However, we feel that it would be research that would be extremely helpful to educators, students, and the general public. It might also be interesting to chart the attitudes, perceptions, and knowledge of students from a junior high level and measure the progress in relationship to the researched paper process in future studies.

Limitations and Importance

There were not so many limitations to this paper as there were more questions that we would have liked to explore. What do students know or care about plagiarism? Do the students who prefer the paper deadlines do a better job on the researched paper? Do the more disciplined students get the better grades all of the time? We are also aware that the more students we could have polled, the more accurate our study would have been. We also would have liked to include some subjective questions within our survey, but we wanted to keep the actual time to take the survey to a ten-minute minimum. We understand that our survey comes with some margin of error. How much, we are not sure, mainly because none of us are math majors and we do not know how to figure the margin of error. We do know that some students did not answer every question on the survey, so some of the numbers of students polled do not match up for every result. Finally, we were limited in time. It would have been nice to have more months to complete a collaborative paper such as this. We understand that some collaborations take years to complete, so we worked together to do the best we could with the resources allotted. We do think, however, that our primary data is important, because it gives some concrete proof that an in-depth academic study on gender issues within

the researched paper would be valid and worthwhile. It is our strong hope that someone or some people will tackle this challenge and publish a lengthy data set and discussion at some time.

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Appendix I

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. You do not need to put your name on this paper, and all answers will be kept confidential. This questionnaire will be used for a collaborative researched paper written by four college students. Thank you for your time.

Circle the most honest response to the following questions:

1. **I am:**
   MALE FEMALE

2. **My current grade level is:**
   FRESHMAN SOPHOMORE JUNIOR SENIOR

3. **My favorite subject is:**
   ENGLISH MATH SCIENCE SOCIAL STUDIES SOCIAL SCIENCE

4. **I am most successful in:**
   ENGLISH MATH SCIENCE SOCIAL STUDIES SOCIAL SCIENCE

5. **The highest educational level achieved by my parents or guardians is:**
   BELOW H.S. H.S. SOME COLLEGE COLLEGE GRAD POST COLLEGE

6. **If given the choice, I would rather:**
   - Re-write a paper if I felt it was poor
   - Turn in a paper knowing I will earn a low grade

7. **I like it better when teachers:**
   - Assign me research deadlines in advance (i.e. give me due dates for note cards, bibliography cards, rough drafts, final draft)
   - Allow me to create my own deadlines knowing the due date of the final draft

8. **It is fine to include my personal experiences (personal stories) in my research paper:**
   - Never
   - Only when appropriate for support or proof
   - Always

9. **When I conduct research for a paper, I am most likely to use the following sources: (Circle all that apply)**
   - Books
   - Magazines
   - Internet
   - Personal Experience

10. **I would rather write:**
    - A short researched paper using only outside sources
    - A personal narrative (a story about myself or a personal experience)
    - A literary analysis (a paper examining literary elements, i.e. symbolism, etc.)

11. I answered number 10 the way I did because:

- It is easier
- It takes less time
- I am most confident in that area

12. Nightly, I spent the following time on my research paper:

- 30-60 minutes
- 60-90 minutes
- 90-120 minutes
- No time, I waited until the last minute

13. Analysis is:

- Reading a story and re-telling it in your own words
- Reading a story and identifying symbolism
- Reading a story and re-writing it

14. Synthesis is:

- Combining many elements into one paper
- Taking may sources and breaking them apart
- Separating "good" sources from "poor" sources

15. I understand why I learn how to write a researched paper:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

16. I enjoyed the time I spend researching for my paper:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

17. I enjoyed the time I spent writing my researched paper:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

18. I learned things that I can use in the future when I wrote my researched paper:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

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